



United States Department of Agriculture  
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## U.S. Exporter Assistance

# e-Government: The Computer Revolution at FAS

By Harold Kanarek

In the past decade, much has changed in the way government agencies deliver services. FAS is no exception.

### Electronic Communication

Since FAS launched its Web site in 1995, more and more FAS customers access information and transact business online. Currently, almost 20,000 visitors come to the site each business day. During 2005, total visits numbered some 6.1 million.

Starting out as one of many tools to communicate information, the Web site has become the primary means of communicating information, and, increasingly, as a way to transact business. Today, the FAS Web site provides comprehensive news as well as the latest commodity import and export data and analysis. In addition, there is information on trade negotiations, exporter assistance, trade forecasts, and production and crop estimates. Much of this crucial market information is now available in

searchable statistical databases such as the BICO (bulk, intermediate, and consumer-oriented foods and beverages reports) and the U.S. Trade Internet system.

### Statistics on Commodities

In 2003, FAS added a PS&D (production, supply and distribution) database to its online offerings. This database contains current and historical USDA data on production, supply, and distribution of agricultural commodities for the United States and other key producing and consuming countries. Users can select from a menu of pre-defined tables categorized by commodity or commodity group, or create custom queries for specific commodities, attributes, and/or countries. The system enables customers to view queried data on-screen or download it as a file that can be opened in a spreadsheet.

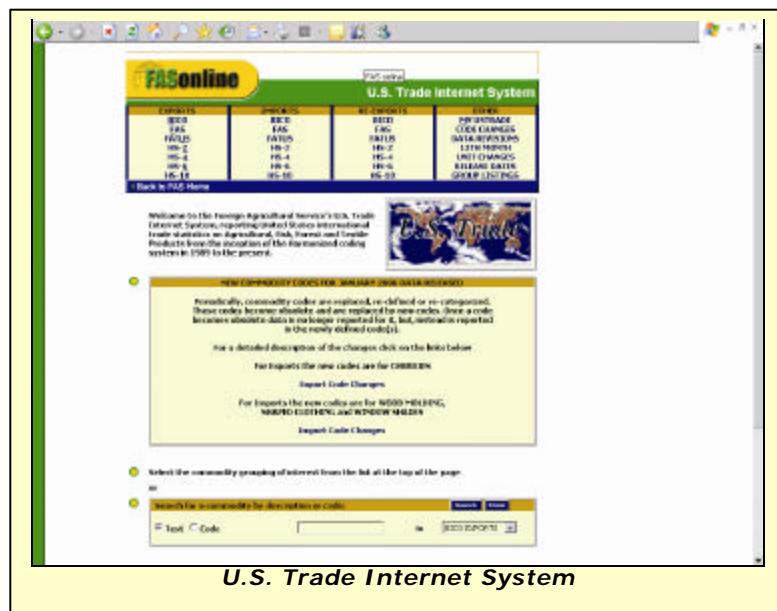
Most recently the agency added a database for processed food export groups. Users can obtain processed food export data by country, year (1989–2005), and food groupings, while choosing several options for data output.

One of the most important additions to the FAS Web site over the past couple of years has been a Web-based analytical tool called Crop Explorer. Crop Explorer provides customers with timely, accurate crop condition information on a global scale unavailable from any other source.

Developed and managed by PECAD (the FAS Production Estimates and Crop Assessment Division), the Crop Explorer site features near-real-time global crop condition information based on satellite imagery and weather data. Thematic maps of major crop regions depict vegetative vigor, precipitation, temperature, and soil moisture. Time-series charts show growing season data for specific agro-meteorological zones. Regional crop calendars and crop



The FAS Home Page



**FAS customers can now do some of their business directly online.**

The UES also allows applicants to make programming recommendations to FAS concerning the Cochran Fellowship Program and export credit programs. Applicants also have the opportunity to recommend trade policy initiatives to FAS' International Trade Policy staff.

Another advantage of the Web site is the ability to apply for a sugar re-export or a dairy import license electronically.

### Exporter Assistance

To assist exporters, FAS has several e-government tools. For companies unfamiliar with exporting, FAS has an electronic export readiness test designed to help businesses make the critical decisions necessary before expanding their market base to customers outside the United States.

A searchable database, the U.S. Suppliers List, maintained in conjunction with NASDA (National Association of State Departments of Agriculture), contains more than 3,800 U.S. exporters and their products. This list helps facilitate contact between U.S. suppliers and potential foreign buyers. The database features more than 500 agricultural product categories under which companies can list their offerings. The database is used by FAS foreign and Washington offices to help export agents, trading companies, importers, and foreign buyers locate U.S. suppliers. It is also used

area maps are also available for selected regions of major agricultural significance.

### Apply Online — It's User-Friendly!

Besides these dynamic information resources, FAS customers can now do some of their business with the agency directly online. Organizations such as export trade associations can apply for market development grants including FMD (Foreign Market Development Program), MAP (Market Access Program), QSP (Quality Samples Program) and TASC (Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops Program) through a UES (Unified Export Strategy) Internet application.

This Web-based application virtually eliminates paperwork and enables FAS to expedite its processing and review of applications. Also, by using the UES, organizations that submitted UES applications in the past do not need to enter certain historical information: it appears automatically in the data entry screens.

### e-Sources

#### Important FAS Internet Links

**Periodical reports**, at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/current.asp>, present information on U.S. and world production, supply and demand, and trade for many commodities, as well as the latest trade policy developments and export marketing information.

**Market- and commodity-specific reports**: <http://www.fas.usda.gov/currwmt.asp>

**News releases and program announcements**: <http://www.fas.usda.gov/info/newsevents.asp>

**FAS Worldwide**, at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/info/fasworldwide/maghome.htm>, is an online, time-stream magazine featuring news about worldwide agricultural markets, trade policy, international linkages, and food aid.

**U.S. Exporter Assistance**: [http://www.fas.usda.gov/agx/exporter\\_assistance.asp](http://www.fas.usda.gov/agx/exporter_assistance.asp)

**Programs and Opportunities**: <http://www.fas.usda.gov/programs.asp>

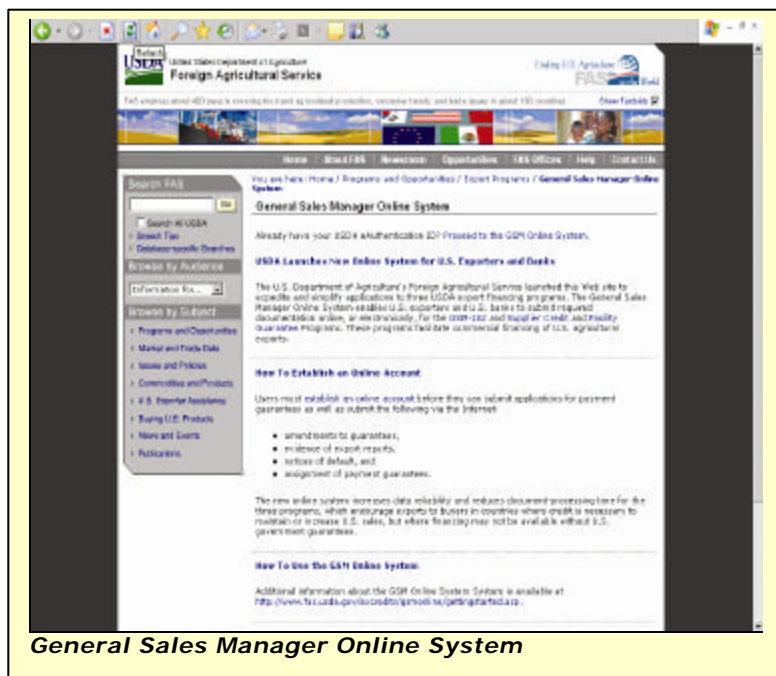
**e-Lists**, at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/scripts/faspush/default.asp>, deliver timely FAS news and Attaché Reports directly to your desktop.

**Searchable Databases**: <http://www.fas.usda.gov/fassearch.asp>

**Trade Negotiations and Agreements**: <http://www.fas.usda.gov/itp/policy/tradepolicy.asp>

**Commodities and Products**: <http://www.fas.usda.gov/commodities.asp>

**Crop Explorer**: <http://www.pecad.fas.usda.gov/cropexplorer/>



**General Sales Manager Online System**

to recruit U.S. exporters to participate in market development activities sponsored by USDA and federal export programs.

The online GAIN (Global Agriculture Information Network) database includes more than 23,000 reports submitted by FAS attachés in offices abroad. The GAIN database (also referred to as Attaché Reports) can provide U.S. exporters the market information needed to make intelligent export decisions. They often contain original research on specific countries and may contain information on both buyers and competitors.

FAIRS (Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards) is a market access searchable database that aims to consolidate information on the technical requirements (i.e. food laws, labeling, import procedures, etc.) for food and agricultural imports of foreign countries.

A database of trade shows allows exporters to find out about upcoming food shows, trade missions, and other promotions in foreign markets.

### GSM Online System

In August 2005, FAS launched a new Web capability to expedite and simplify documentation for three USDA export financing

programs. The General Sales Manager Online System enables U.S. exporters and banks to submit required documentation online, or electronically, for the GSM-102 (Export Credit Guarantee Program), the Supplier Credit Guarantee Program and the Facility Guarantee Program. These programs facilitate commercial financing of U.S. agricultural exports.

This online system increases data reliability and reduces processing time for the three programs, which encourage exports to countries where credit is necessary to maintain or increase U.S. sales, but where financing may not be available without U.S. government guarantees. The system also helps fulfill USDA's e-government goals by providing online trade assistance and electronic access to USDA loan programs.

### export.gov

In addition to making programs accessible via the Internet that once were available only in print and by mail, FAS is providing new levels of support to U.S. exporters by consolidating USDA's export-related assistance and market information with similar information from partners in the federal and private sectors.

Now, in one location at <http://www.export.gov>, exporters may identify potential trading partners, access multi-agency requirements for documenting, packaging, labeling, and shipping products overseas, locate the services and financing tools available from multiple agencies, and access a wide variety of market research reports to identify international business opportunities. ■

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